

Assignment 2 Literature Review

Timothy Rasey

Dr. Romero

Qualitative Research 4309

INRODUCTION

How is patriarchy depicted in Assassins Creed Two? The purpose of this study is to answer that question. Assassins Creed is a video game about Assassins fighting off Templars who are trying to take control of Italy. I chose Assassins Creed Two as my unit of analysis because the games prevalence of male characters in contrast to the few female characters. I analyzed language used in the game such as jokes toward or about women and how women are referenced by men and other women. I also analyzed throughout the game is body image, size and shape of the body that are perceived as attractive to viewers and body languages, the way the characters move as in seductively, femininely, or masculinity, of non-playable characters (NPCs) and playable characters (PCs) and the roles that each character have. The objects in the environment of the game were also analyzed and taken into consideration. There are a lot of games that depict patriarchy in many different ways, but Assassins Creed Two stands out because it takes place in the Renaissance where prostitution was societally accepted. Studying Assassins Creed Two is sociologically relevant because of its potential to influence the attitudes and behaviors of its gamers and how they perceive male and female relationship outside of the gaming world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Patriarchy can be clearly seen throughout the culture of United States especially in media and video games. Many studies have been accumulated over this topic providing evidence of patriarchy within the United States culture through their portrayal in video games. The works talk about ideal body images, cultural values that reinforce gender roles, different types of social reactions towards women in the gaming industry, and social interaction between female and male gamers. It is important to understand these social and cultural values

because it can affect and influence players' perceptions towards women in or outside of video games. The following section contributes to the main focus of this research question, "How Patriarchy is depicted in Assassins Creed Two?"

Body images in video games are disproportionate with real world achievability. Video games can reinforce the ideas of unattainable goals of being really thin or extremely muscular. Researchers Dill and Thill (2007) found that female video game characters are normally depicted as sex objects with curvaceously thin figures and are considered visions of beauty while males were described as big and muscular. In another study researchers Martins, Williams, Harrison, and Ratan (2009) measured the bodies of characters in almost realistic video games and found that the characters' chest, waist, and hip sizes are significantly smaller, than a real woman's body would be. Games that were measured by Martins, Williams, Harrison, and Ratan, in 2009 are not as realistic as the ones today, but are still following the thin body and big chest trend. The most common characteristic used to describe males in video games was muscular and for females was big breasts (Dill and Thill, 2007). Their research reinforces the ideal body image that is portrayed in other forms of media which is imbedded in our cultural values and social norms.

Our cultural values and norms are heavily influenced by patriarchal ideals. There are many signs of patriarchy throughout media and it influences how characters in games are designed to act. This also reinforces gender roles and how characters are portrayed in games. Researchers Torres Eça and Aparecida da Conceição (2014) did research on images of Lord of the Rings and Assassins Creed and found that males were depicted as warriors and carried weapons in an indoor or outdoor setting. However, they don't mention anything about female characters and their main focus was the accuracy of the images portrayed in the medieval

time period in video games. Dill and Thill (2007) combined characteristics of aggression and sexual objectification were more likely to be implemented in female video game characters than in male characters. In their study they also found that males are usually seen posing with weapons while females are sexualized and objectified. Researchers Fisher and Jenson (2016) looked at pink games, games made specifically for girls, focus on reproducing the sexual division of labor through a variety of domestic role playing scenarios such as child rearing and household management. Their findings show the reinforcement of gender roles and minimizing female characters.

In another study, researchers Murnen, Greenfield, Younger, and Boyd (2015) did a study on costumes, dolls, action figures, and Valentine's Day cards. They selected the most popular items for both genders in each category and studied the stereotypes for each item. They said, "the products [were] found to be very gender stereotyped in a way that could perpetuate patriarchy where males are characteristically masculine and dominant and females were cued with sexual submissiveness"(2015: 89). Their research furthered our understanding of patriarchy in our culture and help explain some social actions implemented towards or about women.

In video gaming females are treated differently than males and it is also perceived that females do not play video games as much as males. Researchers Fisher and Jenson (2016) found statistically that 44% of gamers in the United States are female. Female gamers are not as rare as society perceives them to be. However, "Women are continually excluded from full participation in digital games spaces as gamers through marketing and cultural practices" (Fisher and Jenson 2016:4). Women have been facing scrutiny for being gamers, developers, or anything related to the gaming industry. "The Experience of Being a woman in games -

whether you are a player, designer, developer, educator, scholar or journalist – is one of constant negotiation and deflection with the dominant, interweaving discourses of that work to keep girls and women in subordinate positions” (Fisher and Jenson 2016:4). The gaming industry is dominated by male’s patriarchal views that women are oppressed, but in online games sometimes females benefit from some aspects of patriarchy.

Women in online video games can benefit from patriarchy because they are viewed as weak or new to gaming when in fact they are just as good as males are or sometimes better. Researchers Linderoth and Öhrn (2014) interviewed college students who identified as online gamers and have played digital games since childhood or just have a background in role-playing games. In their research they found that some players benefit from being females because they can get more from trading with other players just because they are a girl. While that is happening it also shows a gender dichotomy within gaming is creating an unbalanced social system in the virtual world. Linderoth and Öhrn explain, “To be a woman in online games includes, according to this study, being treated specially, sometimes to get a nicer reception, extra help or favors from online male players, but also being less likely to be recognized as a skilled player” (2014: 43). Additionally, research has shown that gamers react differently to male and female voices. In their analysis, Kuznekoff and Rose (2013) found that gamers reacted better to male voices giving a command than females even if they are giving the same instructions. Gender differences in gaming also impact females on a personal level. Research has shown that female players sometimes get hit on by guys who are extremely dirty when they flirt. The flirting can get to where it is almost considered sexual harassment if pushed too far. Researchers Fisher and Jenson said, “Women who speak up and out about sexism in digital games culture and industry are met with coordinated online and

offline attacks by cybermobs and anonymous individuals” (2016:4). The social system in video gaming is unbalanced and women don’t get a break from being viewed as subordinate to men.

In the end patriarchy is embedded in every aspect of the gaming world, video game characters are over sexualized and objectified in games as well as female gamers. Body images that are set in our culture are reinforced in games for both males and females. Actions of characters and gamers alike reinforce patriarchal views and will keep being reinforced unless there are social changes. Women and men are stereotypically put into gender roles and video game characters do not deviate from this standard. Female gamers and developers are not being taken seriously and receive much discredit even though they have talent.

Subsequent research that will be provided on Assassin’s Creed Two will further amplify the awareness of patriarchy in the gaming culture. Future research regarding patriarchy within Assassin’s Creed Two will include hours of gameplay, analysis of every cinematic scene in the game from missions to important interactions in side quests, the humor displayed within the characters, as well as the attire they adorn themselves with, and the seductive movements of the non-playable characters. The social hierarchy in game presented through multiple facets can be paralleled to our culture in the United States in present time due to this.

DATA AND METHODS

The data sample is my game play of Assassins Creed Two. It takes place during the Renaissance when Italy was divided into city states. Prostitution was accepted and discouraged during this time period. I own the game and have access to all the data I need. I will be playing the game from start to finish and record all the data that will fall under patriarchal ideas, body language, body image, gender roles, jokes, the language or terms discussed by all characters

in the game, and the environment such as statues and background information behind them. The game is open world, meaning I can freely move around the entire map of the game in the locations my missions are in, and complete side quests and see how patriarchy is depicted throughout these missions. I will use the same analysis for every mission I do throughout the game.

When conducting my research, I would sit for hours playing the game and record what I have seen after completing a mission of any kind. There are main quest missions and multiple side missions that are available to me. Each type of side mission have their own common theme such as the ones called beat up events. The missions that are called “beat up events” are missions that involve unfaithful husbands talking to other women and you have to fight the man in order to make them go back to their wife or girlfriend. The main quests at the beginning of the game would be similar to the side missions only because the tutorial of the game is giving us an idea of what kind of side quests I will be completing.

Main quest missions in Assassins Creed Two is about Ezio Auditore, which I play as, and how he goes through life in his quest to avenge his family and to stop Templars from controlling the world. Templars are a secret organization in the game that want to control the world and the biggest rivals of the Assassins. Assassins are those who fight against the Templars and seek justice so that people may live their lives freely. Ezio Auditore is an Assassin and I am going to be recording his actions against the Templars and his interactions with others in the game such as his family, friends, mentors, and sexual interests.

When in combat there are different types of men that I would be fighting. I will be looking at how weaker men are portrayed before, during, and after combat. Weaker men are often pushed around or have roles that are not in leadership and lack physical strength such as Ezio’s

best friend Leonardo Da Vinci. Leonardo Da Vinci will be examined as well and how his character as well as other weaker men are portrayed in the game.

Assassins Creed Two takes place during the Renaissance where men are in the seat of power. Most of the characters that have significant roles in the game are male and a few are female. I will be examining how characters interact with each other, the roles in which women have, and how they obtained high ranks within the organization of Assassins. I will also look at the lack of female presence among leaders. There are indicators of patriarchy in the environment of Assassins Creed Two and it will be examined as well. There are statues of significant leaders of the past in the guild of Assassins and the portrayal of the female and male leaders show inequality in terms of their backgrounds and the way they killed their targets.

There hasn't been any study conducted on how patriarchy is depicted in Assassins Creed Two particularly which makes the study unique. However, there are limitations to this study due to the fact that I am not able to interview the developers of the game as well as other gamers who have played the game. Also I did not live during the Renaissance, therefore I cannot transcribe what actually took place during that time and see how women were treated. I completed all the missions of the main story line, but there is an endless number of side quests. I only did a handful of side quests to get a general idea of what they are about. Even with these limitations I am still able to answer my research question, how is patriarchy depicted in Assassins Creed Two.

Data Analysis

The main reason for this study is to see how patriarchy is depicted in Assassins Creed Two. In order to conduct this study, I played the game Assassins Creed Two from start to finish. I analyzed all the interactions of the characters in the game during cut scenes, combat, and

exploring the world of the game. Through my analysis I generated three major themes, 1) hyper masculinity, 2) objectification of women, and 3) treatment of less masculine men. I discuss each theme to provide readers a critical analysis of Assassins Creed Two in order to answer how patriarchy is depicted in Assassins Creed Two.

Hyper Masculinity

Theme 1: Majority of males have muscular bodies, are in leadership roles, and abuse subordinate men.

A major finding during this study is the body image of the men. They are displayed as big and muscular in comparison to their subordinates. The men are mobile and almost have no body fat what so ever unless they are civilians that have no significant meaning other than to hide in big crowds from guards. When hiring mercenaries to aid me in battle they are always muscular, carry a two handed sword, and insult their enemies calling them stronzo (fucker) in Italian. In order for the mercenaries to increase their aggressive behavior they remind themselves something of their past such as the death of a sister or insult the guards when they charge into fight. Mercenaries would yell, “You were there when my sister was killed!” or they would say, “You better start running if I were you!”

Mercenaries are depicted as muscular because they serve as men for hire to fight those whom I see as the enemy and obstruct me from achieving my goals. The fact that the mercenaries are muscular in that society says that they are reliable, can get job tasks done that require violence, and are great for military purposes. The same can be said about the guards that wear heavy armor and carry two handed weapons. Guards are uniformed and the leaders are resilient and fight till they die. Men in the military have a higher standing in society as well and can push others around to get what they want.

The main character I play as is hyper masculine as well. Ezio Auditore is not necessarily bulky, but is fit and mobile. He stands tall, faces everything with confidence, if a task seems impossible he will find a way to get the job done. Ezio is always charming the ladies even when he doesn't even try. In the start of the game Ezio shows off his strength by insulting his rival Vieri De' Pazzi whom throws a rock at Ezio's face and, I playing as Ezio, beat up Vieri. Vieri runs and later I encounter and kill him during the storyline. When I taunt with Ezio he says, "Hurry up I have a mistress waiting on me!" to display masculinity and to intimidate his opponent.

Ezio is being guided by those who are leaders. His biggest influence after the death of his father and two brothers is his uncle Mario Auditore. Mario Auditore is an assassin and guides Ezio down the same path Ezio's father went. Mario Auditore is a very stout man, muscular, and commands an army of mercenaries. Mario is head strong, acts quick with a blade, and is always up for a fight. There are other leaders in the group of assassins and majority of them are male with only a couple of females. The males in the group of assassins all command men at arms or serve as protectors while the women are in command brothels which are positions of subordination to men.

The two main female assassin leaders are Paola of La Rosa Colta and Teodora of La Rosa della Virtú. Both manage brothels and even though they are there to guide Ezio, they cater to his needs and demands without question. After the death of his father and two brothers he is taken to a brothel, so his sister and mother can hide there. He just tells her, "Watch over my sister and mother." As if he is the boss and with no respect of her authority and Paola just simply agrees. When Ezio meets Teodora who is a nun and a courtesan, also known as an escort, questions her methods. Teodora tells Ezio, "Men must know how to love in order to

reach salvation. My girls and I provide that through our congregation.” Teodora’s statement affirms the control of men over women. Women throughout the game are subordinate to men and the same can be said about men who are less masculine.

Ezio was on his way to visit his best friend Leonardo Da Vinci, but saw from a distance being kicked and beaten by a guard. The guard is hyper masculine due to the fact that he is beating down on someone that cannot defend themselves. Ezio had to step in and kill the guard to save Leonardo from brutality.

Treatment of less masculine men

Theme 2: Body image of less masculine men, their job roles, and fear of death.

Ezio best friend Leonardo Da Vinci does not have a muscular build. Leonardo is an intellect with a skinny body, is not aggressive, and stays away from conflict. In this society these attributes are viewed as less masculine because he could not defend himself when a guard was beating on him. Leonardo just stayed on the ground taking hits from a guard till Ezio killed the guy. Other types less masculine men are portrayed similarly with slim bodies, are not muscular, and have less extravagant clothing.

The jobs that less masculine men have are messengers, thieves, musicians, and low ranking guards. Messengers run in fear when they see Ezio and automatically assume he is trying to kill them. Thieves flee from Ezio after robbing him and they wear tattered clothes and climb up buildings to evade him. When in pursuit of a thief, the thief says, “Please leave me alone I just need something to eat!” This is looked down upon in that society because thievery is breaking the law and is seen as an act of a less masculine man. Thieves are used to lure guards away especially when paths are blocked by a line of guards. Musicians are viewed as weaker men because their expertise is in art, does not require violence, and they

run in fear if pushed or knocked over. On the other hand low ranking guards will fight alongside their leaders, but once their leaders are lost they flee in fear.

Less masculine men have more fear of death than hyper masculine men. When in combat they flee when a leader dies. When civilians witness the killing of a target or a guard die, they flee in a panic knocking down anyone in their path. Normally that would be considered a normal reaction to death, but it also includes some guards fleeing as well rather than fighting Ezio if there is only a handful of guards and no leader or captain among their ranks.

Objectification of women

Theme 3: Conversations of between characters regarding women, courtesans body shape, and clothing.

References

- Dill, Karen E. and Kathryn P. Thill. 2007. "Video Game Characters and the Socialization of Gender Roles: Young People's Perceptions Mirror Sexist Media Depictions" *Sex Roles* 57(11/12): 851-864. doi:10.1007/s11199-007-9278-1
- Fisher, Stephanie and Jennifer Jenson. 2016. "Producing Alternative Gender Orders: A Critical look at girls and gaming" *Learning, Media And Technology* 1-13. doi:10.1080/17439884.2016.1132729
- Kuznekoff, Jeffrey H. and Lindsey M. Rose. 2013. "Communication in multiplayer gaming: Examining player responses to gender cues" *New Media And Society* 15(4): 541-556. doi:10.1177/1461444812458271
- Linderoth, Jonas., Elisabet Öhrn. 2014. "Chivalry, subordination and courtship culture: Being a 'Woman' in online games" *Journal of Gaming & Virtual Worlds* 6(1): 33-47. doi:10.1386/jgvw.6.1.33_1
- Martins, Nicole, Dmitri C. Williams, Kristen Harrison, and Ryan Ratan. 2009. "A Content Analysis of Female Body Imagery in Video Games." *Sex Roles* 61(11/12): 824-836. doi:10.1007/s11199-009-9682-9
- Murnen, Sarah K., Claire Greenfield, Abigail Younger, and Hope Boyd. 2015. "Boys Act and Girls Appear: A Content Analysis of Gender Stereotypes Associated with Characters in Children's Popular Culture" *Sex Roles* 74(1/2):78-91. doi:10.1007/s11199-0558-x

Torres Eça, Teresa and Rosângela Aparecida da Conceição. 2014. "Reading Contemporary Imaginaries By Middle Ages Narratives Through Mass Media Images" *ANASTASIS. Research in Medieval Culture and Art*